CR ConsumerReports®

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ConsumerReports®

On Health

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Made in the USA?

Why it's key to know where your food comes from

WHAT DO THE WORDS "Product of USA" on meat, poultry, and egg labels mean to you? According to a Department of Agriculture survey, in the case of beef and pork, a significant percentage of consumers believe it means the item was from animals born, raised, slaughtered, and processed in the U.S.

But the voluntary label (sometimes worded as "Made in the USA") has been permitted on some food products "from animals that have been shipped to the U.S., and then repackaged or processed in the U.S.," says Brian Ronholm, Consumer Reports' director of food policy. Companies can also use the label on meat from animals that were imported, fed in the U.S. for a couple of months, and then slaughtered here.

Now, the USDA has proposed that the label be allowed only on meat, poultry, and egg products from animals born, raised, slaughtered, and processed in the U.S. CR supports this. "Shoppers sometimes pay premium prices for products carrying the 'Product of USA' label and deserve to know they can depend on that claim," Ronholm says.

Is safety part of the issue? Under USDA rules, countries eligible to ship such items to the U.S., "have demonstrated that their food safety system is equivalent to ours, so theoretically, there shouldn't be safety concerns about these products," Ronholm says. However, because issues may arise from time to time—like the case of mad cow disease in Brazil earlier this year, "it would be helpful to have this type of transparency in place," he says.

As we await next steps on the USDA proposal, you can get more information on a variety of food labels and seals at **CR.org/foodlabels**.

THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS

We contact health authorities and medical researchers from across the country. Here are some of the experts we consulted this month:

Neil Alexander, MD, professor, geriatric and palliative medicine, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Caroline Cromwell, MD, associate professor of medicine, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, N.Y.

Sharon Curhan, MD, ScM, epidemiologist, Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School, Boston.

Caroline Fife, MD, medical director, St. Luke's Wound Clinic, The Woodlands, Texas.

Ilaria St. Florian, MS, clinical dietitian, Stamford Health, Connecticut.

David Margolis, MD, PhD, director, cutaneous ulcer program, Penn Medicine, Philadelphia.

Melissa Phillips, MS, registered dietitian, University of Wisconsin Health system Digestive Health Center, Madison.

Rachel Prusynski, DPT, PhD, assistant professor, division of physical therapy, University of Washington, Seattle.

William Schaffner, MD, infectious disease specialist, Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Nashville.

Vijaya Surampudi, MD, assistant professor of medicine, UCLA Center for Human Nutrition, Los Angeles.

PHOTOS, COVER, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: TRINETTE REED/STOCKSY; GETTY IMAGES (2); CLAUDIA TOTIR/GETTY IMAGES. PHOTOS, THIS PAGE: GETTY IMAGES (2)

Health Wire

The Best Produce for Staying Strong

Getting an additional 10 mg of the compound quercetin from food each day (the amount in a large apple or two-thirds cup of cooked kale) cut the odds of the onset of frailty by 35 percent in a study. Quercetin neutralizes DNA-damaging molecules in the body. Asparagus, blueberries, broccoli, cherries, and onions are other sources.

Source: American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, April 2023.

Virtual Help for Parkinson's

Parkinson's disease can make the voice very soft, breathy, or hoarse. But a small study found that older adults with the illness had louder voices after 12 weeks of telehealth vocal therapy. Researchers say this shows that telehealth is as effective as in-person help.

Source: International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders, June 7, 2023.

DO THIS FOR YOUR HEART

Depression can raise the risk of cardiovascular problems by 72 percent. That's according to scientists who conducted a recent study of middle-aged and older adults on how treatment for the mood disorder may be protective. They found that psychotherapy lowered the risk of heart attack, stroke, heart disease, and death over three years.

Source: European Heart Journal, May 7, 2023.

A Surprising Way to Reduce Pain

Starting or sticking with regular exercise was linked to higher pain tolerance in a Norwegian study. Participants who did 4 hours a week of an activity such as walking, biking, gardening, or playing sports coped better with discomfort than those who didn't exercise. The scientists measured the increased pain tolerance by how long participants could hold a hand in a bucket of cold water. Activity may reduce pain sensitivity by releasing feel-good brain chemicals.

Source: PLOS One, May 24, 2023.

WATCH OUT FOR THIS FRACTURE RISK

Type 2 diabetes is known to increase bone fracture risks. Now a study has found that women with prediabetes before menopause were more than twice as likely to break a bone over a 12-year period or longer than those with normal blood sugar levels. If you have prediabetes, talk to your doctor about bone health.

Source: JAMA Network Open, May 23, 2023.

How to Get Sleep More Quickly

Watching the clock during sleepless nights made insomnia worse and hiked the odds of people using sleep drugs, according to a recent study. If you can't sleep, one of the co-authors suggests visualizing a relaxing place, like a beach, or getting up and doing something low-key, like a jigsaw puzzle, until you're drowsy.

Source: The Primary Care Companion for CNS Disorders, May 16, 2023.

PHOTOS, FROM TOP: ROMAN SAMOKHIN/GETTY IMAGES; GETTY IMAGES; ARIEL SKELLEY/GETTY IMAGES; KEVIN E BRINE/ADOBE STOCK

How to Stand Up More Easily

The simple exercises and strategies that really help

As we get older, the act of standing up from a sitting or lying down position becomes more difficult. "Standing requires both leg strength and power," says Rachel Prusynski, DPT, PhD, an assistant professor in the division of physical therapy at the University of Washington and a spokesperson for the American Physical Therapy Association. "Everyone gets weaker as we age because our muscles start to lose mass, especially the large muscles in our legs that we use to stand." Getting up also requires balance, coordination, flexibility, and aerobic capacity, which can decline over the years.

All of this can make a lot of daily activities, such as getting out of bed or up from the couch, harder. If you're having difficulty, consider the steps below.

Get Up With Less Effort

These strategies can help you stand, and some may help you do strengthening exercises better (see below).

› **Opt for firm seats.** They're easier to get out of than those that are cushier. To firm up a soft seat, an easy fix is to place something like a piece of plywood underneath the cushions.

› **Raise your chair.** With a higher seat you won't have to rise as far to stand. If you don't have an adjustable-height chair or a supportive bar-stool-style chair, you can purchase furniture risers. These hard plastic items attach to the legs of chairs, sofas, and beds to raise them. You might also want a raised toilet seat.

› **Position yourself right.** Before standing up, slide to the edge of your seat. Place your feet flat on the floor and slightly behind your knees, shoulder-width apart. Then lean your torso forward to help propel you up to standing. Lying down? Roll onto your side and use your arms to push up to a seated position.

› **Use assistive devices if needed.** A regular cane or walker can tip or slip if you use it to help you stand. Devices called couch canes and bed canes shouldn't. Similar tools, often called safety rails, can help you get up from a toilet. Chair assists, which are cushionlike items you can place on a seat, use hydraulics or springs to boost you up.

› **Know when to talk to your doctor.** If difficulty standing interferes with everyday tasks or activities you enjoy, or you fall while you're trying to stand or sit, tell your doctor. Do the same if you see no improvement after doing the sit and stand exercises described below regularly for a few weeks. Your doctor can determine if you're dealing with a condition such as arthritis or neuropathy. In some cases, they may prescribe physical therapy to help you improve your ability to stand up.

4 MOVES TO TRY

For standing, you use your back and ab muscles and those that run from your calves and thighs up to your glutes. To strengthen them, "there's nothing better than just getting out of a chair," says Neil Alexander, MD, a professor of geriatric and palliative medicine at the University of Michigan.

So "practice" sitting down in and getting up from a chair six to eight times at least two to three times a day. You should see improvement in a few weeks. The following can help you even more:

- **Stand up without using chair armrests.** If you feel unstable, lightly touch the armrests with your fingertips.
- **Pause on your way up.** Each time you're ready to stand, stop briefly midway. This uses your muscles instead of momentum to get up.
- **Lower yourself slowly.** "Sit down gently like a hen onto a nest full of eggs," says Rachel Prusynski, DPT, PhD, a spokesperson for the American Physical Therapy Association. This also engages your muscles.
- **Swap seats.** Stand up from lower and softer surfaces, which requires more strength.

PHOTO: PIXTA

The Foods That Prevent Anemia

If you're lacking energy, you may be short on iron. What to eat to make sure you get enough.

MANY PEOPLE THINK that feeling tired is a normal part of getting older. But there may be another reason: One in 6 adults over the age of 65 have anemia, a condition caused by not having enough healthy red blood cells to carry sufficient oxygen throughout the body. Most often, it's because the iron needed to make these cells is lacking, leading to iron-deficiency anemia.

Causes of Anemia

Some gastrointestinal issues keep your body from getting iron from the foods you eat. "As you get older, the cells in your stomach lining can die off, so you don't absorb iron properly," says Michael Auerbach, MD, a clinical professor of medicine at Georgetown University.

Certain medicines, such as those for acid reflux, may also interfere with iron metabolism. Taking low-dose aspirin every day raised the risk of anemia by 20 percent in older adults, according to a 2023 study published in the Annals of Internal Medicine. Aspirin can cause gastrointestinal bleeding and reduce iron levels through blood loss.

An underlying health issue could also be the cause of iron deficiency, says Caroline Cromwell, MD, an associate professor of medicine at Mount Sinai's Icahn School of Medicine. Some conditions that are common in older adults, such as ulcers, colon polyps, and cancer, can cause internal bleeding, she says.

If you suspect that you're low in iron or have any signs of anemia, such as fatigue, dizziness, shortness of breath, and cold hands or feet, see your healthcare provider before you take any action.

Meeting Your Needs

Men and women over age 50 require 8 mg of iron a day. "Most American adults get enough iron through diet," says Vijaya Surampudi, MD, an assistant professor of medicine at UCLA's Center for Human Nutrition. (See "Top Sources of Iron," below.)

But vegans and vegetarians may need to get up to 15 mg, she says. That's because the body absorbs just 1 to 10 percent of the iron in plants and iron-fortified foods, called nonheme, compared with 25 to 30 percent of the heme iron in meat, fish, and poultry.

To aid iron absorption from plant foods, eat those with vitamin C (such as citrus, tomatoes, bell peppers, and broccoli) at the same meal. Research suggests this can help you get as much as seven times the iron from plant-based sources.

Consider what you're drinking, too. Coffee and tea reduce iron absorption. Antioxidants in these drinks called polyphenols can bind to iron, blocking them from entering the bloodstream, Surampudi says. Stop sipping those beverages an hour or more before your meal.

TOP SOURCES OF IRON

- **Fortified breakfast cereals,** 1 serving: 18 mg
- **Oysters,** cooked, 3 oz.: 8 mg
- **White beans,** canned, 1 cup: 8 mg
- **Lentils,** cooked, 1 cup: 6 mg
- **Tofu,** firm, 1 cup: 6 mg
- **Beef,** top round, cooked, 4 oz.: 4 mg
- **Potato,** baked, 1 medium with skin: 2 mg
- **Pumpkin seeds,** 1 oz.: 2 mg
- **Stewed tomatoes,** canned, ½ cup: 2 mg
- **Bread,** white or whole wheat, 1 slice: 1 mg
- **Chicken,** roasted, 4 oz.: 1 mg

Should You Supplement?

Given this information, you may be tempted to take iron pills as insurance. Don't do so without talking to your doctor first, Cromwell says. There are other types of anemia, and supplements can mask the symptoms of iron-deficiency anemia. This can delay a diagnosis of any medical issue that's triggering the iron shortage.

What's more, your body holds on to iron, so you can get too much. A 2001 study in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that 13 percent of white Americans ages 67 to 96 had iron levels that were too high due to, in part, taking supplements. An excess of the mineral can trigger digestive problems, such as cramps and nausea, according to Cromwell. And in the long run, iron can build up and harm the organs where it's stored, such as the liver or heart. Research has also linked iron overload to a higher risk of type 2 diabetes, certain heart conditions, and cancer.

LEARN

For more on other conditions that may cause fatigue, go to CR.org/energytips.

PHOTO: JAN WISCHNEWSKI/STOCKFOOD

Your Shingles Prevention Guide

Everything you need to know about this painful illness and the vaccine that can protect you

CHICKENPOX MAY BE fairly rare these days, thanks to the vaccine introduced for it back in 1995. But if you're one of the millions of Americans who had chickenpox in your youth, you probably know it can come back to haunt you many years later, in the form of shingles, which causes a blistery rash—but can have more serious effects.

Both chickenpox and shingles are caused by the varicella-zoster virus, says Sharon Curhan, MD, ScM, a physician and epidemiologist at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School in Boston. "After a person has chickenpox, the virus stays in their body for the rest of their life."

Usually, the varicella-zoster virus remains dormant, suppressed by the immune system. But in about 1 in 3 people in the U.S.—mostly older adults—it reactivates, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

However, Shingrix, a two-dose shingles vaccine that was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 2017, can reduce the incidence of shingles and its complications significantly. "The vaccine, the one we have available today, is spectacularly effective," says William Schaffner, MD, an infectious disease specialist at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, Tenn.

But only about 30 percent of adults eligible for this vaccine have gotten it, according to a 2022 report by the Government Accountability Office. If you're wondering about the effects and risks of shingles and whether Shingrix is right for you, here's what you need to know.

How sick can shingles really make me?

It varies from person to person. The blistery rash, which can be painful and itchy, is certainly uncomfortable for most people. In 8 percent of cases, people also experience eye shingles, which causes pain, redness, and swelling in one or both eyes and can even lead to permanent vision loss. Up to 18 percent of people with shingles develop postherpetic neuralgia (PHN)—severe nerve pain in the area of the rash—that can linger for months or even years.

In a small number of cases, shingles can cause even more serious complications, as it did for Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., who experienced vision and balance impairments, facial paralysis, and encephalitis (brain swelling) after coming down with the virus. Occasionally, shingles can also cause hearing problems or pneumonia, and very rarely, it can lead to death—it's thought that fewer than 100 people die from the virus each year, according to the CDC.

Shingles may also affect systems such as the heart. A study published in the Journal of the American Heart Association in 2022 found that the virus is associated with an almost 30 percent higher long-term risk of heart attack or stroke. It's thought shingles may cause damage to blood vessels, says study author Curhan. However, because the study was conducted before Shingrix became widely available, more research needs to be done to determine whether the vaccine may be protective.

Who should and shouldn't get Shingrix?

The CDC recommends that almost everyone over the age of 50 get two doses of the Shingrix vaccine, including those who already had shingles. (The doses should be separated by two to six months.) Adults ages 19 and older who have weakened immune systems due to a medical condition or treatment should also get two doses of Shingrix.

Those who have ever had a severe allergic reaction to any component of the vaccine shouldn't get it, and people who had a severe allergic reaction after their first dose of Shingrix shouldn't have a second dose. The CDC also doesn't recommend

PHOTOS, FROM LEFT: GETTY IMAGES; SHUTTERSTOCK; GETTY IMAGES

getting the vaccine if you currently have shingles or a moderate or severe illness, such as COVID-19 or the flu. Wait until you recover. (If you have a mild cold, it's okay.) It's also fine to get Shingrix at the same time as other adult vaccines, like your flu shot or an updated COVID-19 vaccine, Schaffner says.

I got Zostavax, the original shingles vaccines, 10 years ago. Should I still get the newer one?

Yes, say experts. (The CDC says it's safe to do so after five years.) Zostavax was shown to reduce the risk of shingles by 51 percent and the risk of PHN by 67 percent. Shingrix, on the other hand, is 97 percent effective at preventing shingles in people between ages 50 and 69, and 91 percent effective in people ages 70 and older. It's also about 90 percent effective in all age groups in preventing PHN.

In addition, Zostavax "worked pretty well initially, but it lost its effectiveness after about five years, especially in people over the age of 70," says Albert Shaw, MD, PhD, a professor of infectious diseases at the Yale School of Medicine in New Haven, Conn. In people ages 70 and up, with healthy immune systems, Shingrix protection appears to remain high for at least seven years after vaccination, according to the CDC.

If I don't think I had chickenpox as a child, do I need this vaccine?

Yes. More than 99 percent of Americans born before 1980 have had chickenpox, even if they don't remember having it, according to the CDC. Most likely, your childhood symptoms were so mild that you (or your parents) didn't realize you had it, according to Ronan Factora, MD, a geriatrician at the Cleveland Clinic.

What happens if I don't get the second dose or don't get it in the time period recommended?

Two doses are more effective than one, according to a 2021 study published in the journal Clinical Infectious Diseases. That study found that two doses reduced the risk of shingles by 13 percent more than one dose. If you missed the window of time for your second dose, the CDC recommends that you just get it as soon as possible.

How common are side effects from the vaccine?

Temporary side effects are very common and can last for two to three days. Most people have a sore arm after the shot, and some also have redness and swelling in the area. A study published in 2020 in the journal Vaccine found that other somewhat common symptoms may include fever, chills, muscle aches and pain, and fatigue. In terms of more serious effects, a study published in 2022 in the American Journal of Epidemiology—that monitored almost 650,000 vaccine doses given to adults over age 50—found no increase in stroke, convulsions, severe allergic reactions, or irregular heartbeat over those who didn't receive the vaccine. However, there is a slight increased risk of developing Guillain-Barré Syndrome, where your immune system attacks your nerves, after the Shingrix vaccine. A study published in JAMA Internal Medicine in 2021 found that it occurred in only three cases per million Shingrix doses.

Where do I get the shingles vaccine, and what will it cost me?

It's usually available only at pharmacies. Here's why: Unlike other vaccines such as the pneumococcal or flu vaccine, which are both covered under Medicare Part B, the shingles vaccine is covered only under a prescription drug plan such as Medicare Part D. This makes it a little more difficult for doctors' offices to deal with insurance, so they usually simply refer people to their local pharmacy, Schaffner says. The good news: The Inflation Reduction Act now eliminates all out-of-pocket costs for vaccines recommended by the CDC, so for those who are eligible, the shingles vaccine is free if you have Medicare Part D or private insurance.

LEARN

Get the lowdown on the booster shots that adults should get at CR.org/boosters.

IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE SHINGLES ...

Shingles may bring a few days of pain, burning, or tingling on one side of your body or face, followed by a painful, itchy, blistery rash. You may also have a headache, chills, and an upset stomach.

If you notice such symptoms, call your doctor right away. You'll be advised to start a prescription antiviral (acyclovir, famciclovir, or valacyclovir) to reduce the course of the illness and the risk of complications. You can also take an over-the-counter pain reliever like acetaminophen (Tylenol and generic) for discomfort. Wet compresses, calamine lotion, and warm oatmeal baths may help, too.

Because you're contagious, you'll need to isolate as much as possible, says Nisha Rughwani, a geriatrician at Mount Sinai Health System in New York City. Once the blisters scab over (usually seven to 10 days, though antivirals may speed this up), you're much less likely to transmit the virus to others. You can expect the rash to fully clear up within two to four weeks. If at any point you experience blisters in the area of your eyes or complications such as hearing loss or facial paralysis, notify your doctor promptly.

Get Relief From Gut Troubles

Constipated? Bloated? The simple strategies to try.

DIGESTIVE WOES—constipation, reflux, gas, bloating—can become more common with age. Age-related shifts in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, reduced appetite and thirst, and difficulty chewing can hamstring the digestion process. Obviously, any alarming or chronic changes in digestion warrant a call to your doctor, but a few easy tweaks can help alleviate, and maybe prevent, occasional problems.

"So many digestive complaints are related to food," says Ilaria St. Florian, MS, a clinical dietitian at Stamford Health in Connecticut. Eating too little of the right things or too much of the foods that make your particular problem worse is often the culprit. Making some changes to your typical menu may help.

The best way to identify what's causing your distress is to keep a food log (and it will make your doctor's job much easier if you show up with one in hand). "Even just a five-day food diary—noting eating times, food consumed, and symptoms—can help you start pinpointing trigger foods, which are very individual," St. Florian says. Here's how to troubleshoot a few of the most common GI complaints.

Constipation

Irregularity isn't a given with age, but people over 65 experience constipation about twice as often as younger people, according to a review published in 2019 in the Canadian Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology. In addition to being uncomfortable and frustrating on its own, constipation can trigger a domino effect of other digestive complaints, including gas and bloating, so it's important to address it, St. Florian says.

THE FOOD FIX Getting adequate fiber and staying hydrated are key for preventing constipation (and the gas and bloating that can come with it). Men and women over age 50 should aim for 30 grams and 21 grams of fiber per day, respectively. Look for foods with insoluble fiber in particular, says Melissa Phillips, MS, a registered dietitian at the University of Wisconsin Health system's Digestive Health Center in Madison. "It's the broom that sweeps everything through

YOUR ESSENTIALS FOR A HEALTHY TUMMY

Eating more plant foods can help you have a healthy variety of good bacteria in your gut. In a study called the American Gut Project, people who ate at least 30 types of plant foods a week had more diverse bugs in their GI tract than those who ate fewer plants. This list and the meal ideas that combine the foods at right show just how easy it can be to work 30 plant foods into just seven meals.

WHOLE GRAINS

- Brown rice
- Farro
- Oatmeal
- Quinoa
- Whole-wheat past

NUTS & SEEDS

- Almonds
- Chia seeds
- Pistachios
- Sesame seeds
- Walnuts

VEGGIES

- Brussels sprouts
- Carrots
- Asparagus
- Spinach
- Sweet potato

ILLUSTRATIONS: LYNN BREMNER

the intestines," she says. Leafy greens, fruits and veggies with edible skin on, dried fruit, nuts, whole grains, beans, and popcorn are good sources of insoluble fiber. (Difficulty chewing can make it tough to eat fiber-rich foods. If you have this problem, speak to your dentist.)

When you increase your fiber intake, increase your fluid, too. It helps bulk up and soften the stool, easing its passage through the system. Aim for a minimum of 1.5 liters a day (6.5 cups), according to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

GOOD TO KNOW "I tell patients, when your body is moving your colon is moving," says Bharati Kochar, MD, a gastroenterologist and assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School in Boston. Aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity a day.

Acid Reflux

That uncomfortable burning feeling can be more common with age, thanks to weakening sphincter muscles that separate the stomach from the esophagus (allowing acidic stomach contents to creep upward), reduced salivation, and other factors. Older adults with chronic reflux have a higher chance of developing gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD.

THE FOOD FIX Fried, fatty, and spicy foods; alcohol; coffee; and peppermint are prime reflux triggers. A 2020 study in the journal Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology found that replacing two daily servings of coffee, tea, or soda with water helped reduce reflux symptoms by 4 to 8 percent. In place of fried or fatty foods, add higher-fiber foods, which can help boost satiety and reduce the desire to eat junk. If acidic foods like citrus fruits and tomatoes bother you, choose fruits and vegetables that aren't as acidic, such as apples, watermelon, and cucumbers. Chewing sugarless gum after meals may help. It prompts saliva production, which helps to neutralize acid and wash it out of the esophagus.

GOOD TO KNOW Reflux can be especially bothersome at night. The most recent GERD treatment guidelines from the American College of Gastroenterology recommend avoiding eating in the 2 to 3 hours before bed and sleeping with your upper body elevated–for example, with a wedge pillow. Losing weight, if necessary, and quitting smoking are two other ways to reduce reflux.

Gas and Bloating

These two often go hand in hand, although you can have one without the other. "Many older adults have gas because they're constipated," Phillips says. When food ferments in the intestines it can cause gas to build up, leading to bloating and the need to pass gas.

THE FOOD FIX Certain types of carbohydrates–called fermentable oligosaccharides, disaccharides, monosaccharides and polyols (FODMAPs)–can ferment in the large intestine and can cause bloating and gas in people sensitive to them. Onions, garlic, cauliflower, apples, dairy milk, wheat, pears, and watermelon are some of the foods high in FODMAPs. Sugar alcohols, such as erythritol, mannitol, and sorbitol–used as sweeteners in many sugar-free foods, such as ice cream, chewing gum, baked goods, and candy–can be, too. Low-FODMAP foods include almond milk, hard cheese, citrus fruits, blueberries, peanuts, and proteins, such as meat and seafood.

It's possible to be bothered by some FODMAP foods but not others, Phillips says, so there's no need to cut them all out. Sometimes it's just the amount of a food you're eating that flips the switch on gas and bloating, she says. If you eat less, you might not experience discomfort.

A nutritionist can help you create a plan to limit foods that may be causing problems, with the goal of eventually adding them back in because many high-FODMAP foods are good for you. "We're trying to do more of a targeted approach to low-FODMAP eating because we're seeing it leading to a lot of restriction, but that's not what we want, especially in older adults who may be having a hard time getting enough healthy food as is," Phillips says. Plus, many FODMAPs feed the healthy bacteria that live in your digestive tract. When you limit those, you affect your overall health. (See "Your Essentials for a Healthy Tummy," below.)

GOOD TO KNOW Check your meds. "Some medications and supplements contain sugar alcohols," Phillips says. Review supplement labels and ask your pharmacist if a drug might contain sugar alcohols.

LEARN
For information on how food can help other common conditions, go to CR.org/healingfoods.

FRUITS

- Avocado
- Blueberries
- Apples
- Kiwifruit
- Tomatoes

LEGUMES

- Black beans
- Edamame
- Chickpeas
- Lentils
- Peas

HERBS & SPICES

- Basil
- Cinnamon
- Ginger
- Rosemary
- Turmeric

HOW TO GET THEM ALL

- Oatmeal with kiwifruit, chia seeds, and cinnamon
- Baked apple topped with walnuts and cinnamon
- Farro with asparagus, peas, and pistachios
- Spinach salad with blueberries, avocado, sesame seeds, and chickpeas
- Quinoa with almonds, carrots, sweet potato, lentils, and rosemary
- Brown rice with edamame, shaved Brussels sprouts, and ginger
- Whole-wheat pasta salad with tomatoes, fresh basil, kale (bonus vegetable!), black beans, and turmeric

Help a Wound Heal Faster

How to avoid having a little cut turn into a dangerous infection

YOU NICK YOURSELF while cutting an onion, drawing blood. Or maybe you bump into your coffee table, scraping your shin. There are endless ways to break the skin. And as we age, our bodies become less efficient at healing, which increases the likelihood these wounds will linger.

Why Healing Slows With Age

Skin becomes thinner, less elastic, and more easily breakable over time, says Peter Abadir, MD, an associate professor of geriatrics at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Sun damage exacerbates the problem, which is why skin on the arms, shins, back of the hands, and other areas routinely exposed to sunlight is particularly delicate.

The skin cells that produce keratin also lose their ability to divide over time, says Elof Eriksson, MD, PhD, professor emeritus of plastic surgery at the Harvard Medical School in Boston. And deficiencies in vitamins and minerals such as vitamin D, vitamin C, and zinc can also slow down healing, experts say.

Meds May Play a Role

Anti-inflammatory drugs, including steroids and pain relievers like ibuprofen, can reduce the speed of recovery because "the first stage of wound healing is inflammation," Abadir says. "If you block inflammation, you delay wound healing."

Blood thinners may also slow down recovery, says Caroline Fife, MD, medical director of St. Luke's Wound Clinic in The Woodlands, Texas.

Never stop taking any drug, however, without first consulting your doctor.

The Right Treatment

For a dirty cut or scrape, start by gently cleaning it with liquid soap and tap water. Then pat it dry and apply a dressing that "creates a moist healing environment," Eriksson says. It's important to retain some moisture because this allows skin cells on the top and border of the wound to stay alive and help heal the area.

If a wound is oozing, wrap it in something absorbent, such as a foam dressing, Eriksson says. For mostly dry wounds, breathable dressings such as Tegaderm work well, he adds, while gauze may dry out the area.

Dry bandages such as gauze may also end up damaging the surrounding skin when you remove them, so if you do use one, consider also using Vaseline or a wound gel to keep the bandage from sticking, Fife suggests.

Topical antibiotics aren't always useful, and "lots of people are allergic to them," Fife says. "If a wound looks like it's infected, you're better off going to your doctor."

When Wounds Won't Go Away

A wound is generally considered chronic if it fails to heal within 30 days, or "whenever it doesn't heal in the [time frame] it's believed that it should heal," says David Margolis, MD, PhD, director of the cutaneous ulcer program at Penn Medicine in Philadelphia.

If you have a chronic condition associated with skin ulcers, such as diabetes or vascular disease, have a "conversation with your healthcare provider to both help you understand what's going on and help minimize or prevent [them]," Margolis says. Sometimes those ulcers can be prevented before they occur.

WHEN TO SEE YOUR DOCTOR

If your wound is large, generally more than 2x2 inches, or deep enough that it extends beyond the skin, you should see a doctor, says Elof Eriksson, MD, PhD, professor emeritus at Harvard Medical School. Smaller, less complicated wounds should clear up within two weeks. That said, if a minor cut or scrape isn't improving in the way or time frame you'd expect, "then you should seek medical attention," says David Margolis, MD, PhD, of Penn Medicine.

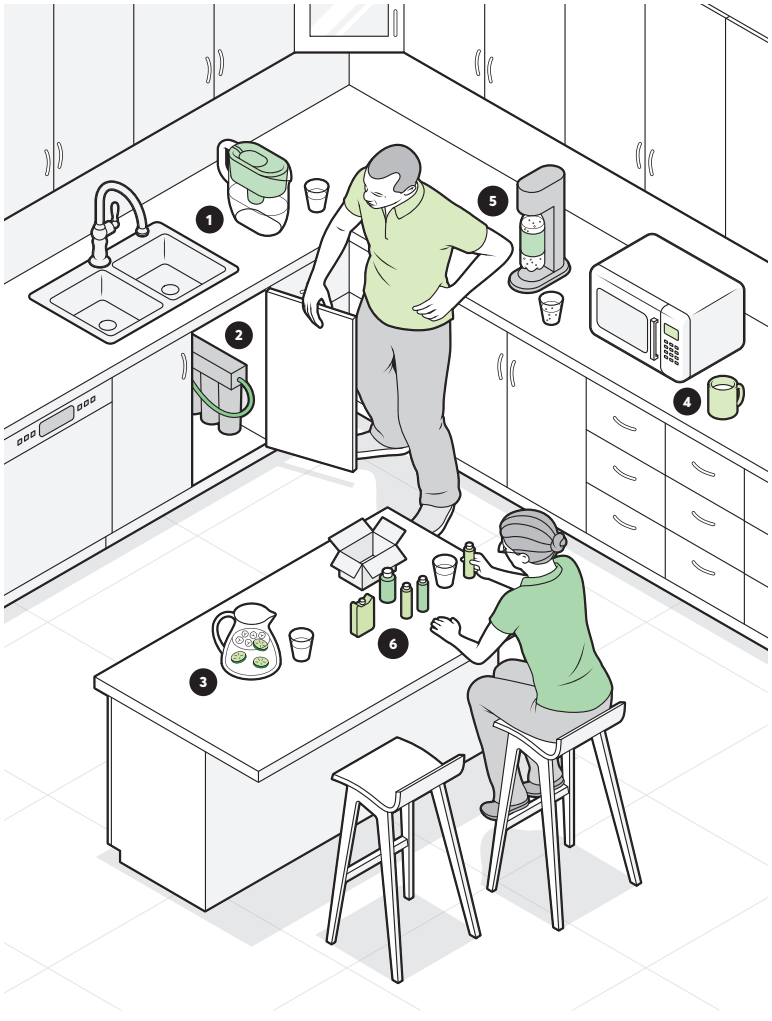
If you're at all unsure, or if your wound is swollen, red, or painful, consider at least sending your doctor a photo, says Peter Abadir, MD, of Johns Hopkins.

PHOTO: LEVI BROWN/TRUNK ARCHIVE

Tips for Tastier Water

When you need to drink more, consider these filters, flavors, and other ideas

LIKE MANY PEOPLE, you may drink less plain water than you did when you were younger. There are a lot of possible reasons for this: Your sense of thirst may diminish with age, for example. And some older adults may no longer find the taste of water very appealing. Still, hydration is crucial for good health, and there are plenty of ways to improve the taste of your drinking water. Here, CR's experts share their advice for making water easier to sip.



1 TRY A WATER FILTER PITCHER

A water filter pitcher can improve the taste and smell of what comes out of your tap (and help remove contaminants such as chlorine and lead). CR tests these products by spiking water with nontoxic additives that mimic the odor and flavor of rotten vegetables, damp soil, metal, or moldy compost. Then a panel of professional tasters evaluates how well each filter removes unpleasant tastes and smells. See our top picks at right; CR members will find our full ratings at **CR.org/waterfilters**.

2 CONSIDER AN UPGRADE

You might also think about purchasing an under-the-sink water filter (these start at around $100 and up). We've found that the under-the-sink filters in CR's tests improve water's taste and odor slightly better than water pitcher filters do.

3 ADD FLAVOR

If even filtered water doesn't taste great, you can doctor it a bit. A splash of 100 percent fruit juice can be a good way to add a little flavor to a glass of water. Or infuse a pitcher with fruits and herbs you like: Citrus, cucumber, berries, melons, basil, and mint are a few possibilities.

4 WARM IT UP

Ice cold not for you? Leave your pitcher or glass out on the countertop or microwave it very briefly to warm it.

5 MAKE IT SPARKLE

If you find bubbly water appealing, carbonation is another way to improve water's taste. Carbonate it yourself with seltzer makers from brands like SodaStream and Drinkmate.

6 CHECK YOUR WATER QUALITY

Taste aside, it's wise to assess your tap water's quality from time to time. Start with a home test kit for lead, and if your water is from a municipal system, look up your supplier's Consumer Confidence Report (epa.gov/ccr). Test well water through an EPA-certified laboratory (epa.gov/dwlabcert) or use a home test kit like those from SimpleLab or WaterCheck. Water filters can help remove any contaminants found (for guidance, go to **CR.org/water**).

CR'S EXPERTS

Joan Muratore leads CR's water filter testing.

Amy Keating is a registered dietitian and nutritionist with CR.

BEST WATER FILTER PITCHERS

Brita Stream Rapids OB55 $37

81 OVERALL SCORE

Pur Basic PPT700W $18

67 OVERALL SCORE

ILLUSTRATION: CHRIS PHILPOT

WORSE — BETTER

CR RECOMMENDED

On Your Mind

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Does the way my blood pressure is checked in the doctor's office matter?

Yes. Common measuring mistakes could throw off your reading by as much as 5 to 20 points, says Kate Kirley, MD, director of chronic disease prevention at the American Medical Association. So empty your bladder first and rest for a few minutes in the exam room. For the reading, sit quietly, legs uncrossed, with your feet flat on the floor. Your back and the arm where the cuff will be placed should be supported. The cuff should go on your bare upper arm, at the height of your heart, and be snug but comfortable before it's inflated. Speak up if something is amiss, Kirley says.

Are some foods more likely to cause foodborne illness?

Because older adults are more susceptible to pathogens in food, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that people ages 65 and older avoid store-made deli salads and heat lunch meats and deli-sliced cheeses until they're steaming hot. (Listeria can spread easily between food and equipment and isn't killed by refrigeration.) It's also smart to skip raw sprouts and unpasteurized dairy products, which can harbor microbes.

Can I get help doing exercises correctly without a pricey personal trainer?

If you belong to a gym, you can often get some individualized help from an instructor simply by asking for it. Or check with your gym or look online for a personal trainer certified in older-adult fitness and ask whether that trainer offers group classes or would lead exercise sessions for you and your friends–who would share the cost, says fitness expert Pamela Peeke, MD, an assistant professor at the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore. Finally, the National Institute on Aging's free Get Fit for Life YouTube videos offer clear, helpful visuals and instructions.

Will cranberry juice and pills protect me from urinary tract infections?

Probably not. Cranberry products are widely used for repeat urinary tract infections, yet there's not much solid evidence they work for older adults. Wiping front to back after bowel movements, staying hydrated, and urinating when you feel the urge may help by discouraging the growth of "bad" bacteria in your bladder. For women, it's also a good idea to avoid vaginal douches, sprays, and powders, which may interfere with "good" vaginal bacteria. In addition, vaginal estrogen creams or suppositories can cut the risk of repeat UTIs for about half of older women by nurturing healthy bacteria.

TALK TO US

HAVE QUESTIONS?
We'll answer those of general interest. Write to CRH, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703 or go to **CR.org/crh** to contact us by email.

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- Clear Up Sinus Problems
- How to Eat for a Stronger Immune System
- Kitchen Hacks to Make Cooking Easier